

MONTANA DNRC Conversation

A Newsletter of the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation • Director Bud Clinch
Fall 2002

—PLANTING TREES—

During the 2000 and 2001 fire seasons, thousands of Montana acres burned, some to severe scorch and some to total stand replacement. In the aftermath, DNRC undertook significant mitigation, salvage, and rehabilitation efforts, some of which were described in the Fall 2001 issue of *DNRC Conversation*. The following article further explores DNRC's rehabilitation efforts by presenting a few examples of recent tree-planting projects, some done cooperatively with other agencies and organizations.



DHS and JHS students learn the particulars of planting seedlings properly from BIRT members.

North of Boulder, Spring 2002

In early spring, while snow was still on the ground, approximately 125 to 150 volunteers helped the Central Land Office (Helena) replant some 300 acres of state school trust land that had burned in the "Boulder Complex Fires" during the summer of 2000. Of those volunteers, approximately 95 were students from nearby Jefferson High School (JHS) and distant Darby High School (DHS).

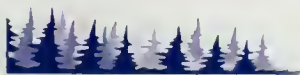
Why was Darby High School involved?

Since the fires of 2000, JHS students had traveled to the Bitterroot Valley on three occasions to assist the Bitterroot RC&D Area Inc., Bitterroot Interagency/Community Recovery Team (BIRT), and Darby High School in their efforts to rehabilitate and reforest the Bitterroot Valley. The students helped affected private landowners by planting hundreds of trees and burning debris piles.

In the spirit of cooperation and appreciation, Darby High School students traveled to Boulder to reciprocate the time and effort that the JHS students had exerted in the Bitterroot Valley. The planting by the students was confined to an 11-acre, burned-over area on the Boulder Beacon tract that had been harvested in the past. Here, there was no risk that a falling, burned tree would endanger a student.

The DHS teens brought with them 900 trees — 600 Douglas-fir, 100 lodgepole pine, and 200 ponderosa pine. These trees were provided at no cost to DNRC, DHS, or JHS. Rather, they were donated by the National Tree Trust to assist with Montana's reforestation efforts. The National Tree Trust was established in 1990 to mobilize volunteer groups, promote public awareness of trees and their benefits, provide grants, and unite civic and corporate institutions in support of local tree

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planting and education projects throughout the United States.

In addition to the students from the two high schools, representatives and forest specialists from the Lewis and Clark Conservation District (CD), the Jefferson Valley CD, the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), BIRT, and the Bitter Root RC&D assisted with the planting efforts. The JHS students will be conducting experiments on the trees and monitoring them for the next two years to determine the overall success of the tree planting.

"This is truly a win-win situation for all that are involved," stated D. J. Bakken, who was Unit Service Forester at that time. "The people of Montana are winning because a portion of state-owned land is being reforested at next to no cost. The high school students gained valuable hands-on exposure and experience working with professionals on a real rehabilitation effort."

Maybe more importantly, through their efforts the students were helping future generations of students, as well as the future of the state.

Coal Creek State Forest, Summer 2002

In the summer of 2002, the Stillwater Unit of DNRC's Northwestern Land Office (Kalispell) continued its salvage and mitigation work after the devastating Moose Fire of 2001. In a large-scale reforestation effort, seedlings were planted in the Coal Creek, Deadhorse Creek, Cyclone Basin, and Winona Ridge areas of the Coal Creek State Forest. The areas had undergone severe-scorch and stand-replacement burns and were of concern for erosion.

During two weeks in July, a Missoula-based contract crew of 8 to 12 individuals planted approximately 135,180 trees. This crew planted, on the average, 11,000 trees per day. Lacking sufficient manpower and equipment, DNRC commonly contracts tree planting.



Seedling planted in the Sula State Forest.

PHOTO BY JON HAYES

The seedlings consisted of 102,600 western larch and 32,580 blister-rust-resistant western white pine, planted to ensure species diversity over these areas as they regenerate. "We fully expect lodgepole pine to regenerate some of the area naturally, but planting these other species ensures that we start the diversity process early," said DNRC Forest Improvement Specialist Dan Cassidy.

Acquired from a nursery, the trees had been grown specifically for summer planting. They arrived at the Stillwater State Forest in a dormant condition so that, when planted, they would grow only roots the first season, allowing them to adapt better to summer's warmer temperatures and drier soil conditions. To keep seedlings cool and moist until they are put in the ground, the foresters keep them in a refrigerated cooler that is completely dark. The amount of water and humidity to which the trees are exposed are monitored during the week or two between the time that the trees arrive at the unit office and the time that the planting begins.

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The monitoring of the new trees is as important as the planting. Stakes were placed throughout the newly planted areas. This so-called "survival staking" will aid in monitoring the success of the summer planting. A number of factors, including animals, inadequate moisture, and planting shock, are expected to cause some seedling mortality, which currently averages about 15 percent.

According to Cassidy, the Coal Creek State Forest is now one big laboratory where DNRC foresters will be monitoring the burned areas throughout the year and assessing the need for more planting next summer. The foresters will also be comparing the planting areas to get information useful for future plantings.



DNRC's Paula Rosenthal (right) accepts a \$10,000 check on behalf of DNRC from Deborah Gangloff, executive director of American Forests. The check assisted in replanting efforts in the Bitterroot Valley.

Sula State Forest, Summer 2002

The Bitterroot Valley, and in particular the Sula State Forest, was one of the areas hardest hit during the fires of 2000. In 2002, DNRC professionals in the Hamilton Unit of the Southwestern Land Office (Missoula) continued their rehabilitation efforts. DNRC had planted all available seedlings as of late spring, taking advantage of the warm weather and early rains to give the trees a strong start. Many of the rehabilitation efforts were assisted by partnerships with other agencies and organizations.

- For example, American Forests and Global Releaf provided \$10,000 to help fund the reforestation of approximately 500 acres of state school trust land. The check helped cover the cost of planting approximately 17,000 ponderosa pine, western larch, and Douglas-fir seedlings in the Sula State Forest. According to Area Silviculturist Jon Hayes, the money made a big difference. "We were able to leverage other dollars with this money, as well as use some of the agency's normal operating dollars, to ensure that this reforestation occurred."
- Using funds from BIRT, as well as the Hamilton Unit's own budget, 33,000 seedlings, including 900 shrub and aspen seedlings, were planted on state-owned lands in the unit. The unit's Blodgett Creek section has been almost entirely replanted.
- In late summer, a contract crew and a crew from the Department of Labor collected about 425 bushels of high elevation ponderosa pine seed cones. Of these, 14 bushels were given to BIRT, and 24 bushels went to the State Forest Nursery in Missoula. The rest will be planted in the Hamilton Unit, primarily in the Sula State Forest, over the next three to five years.
- Next year the unit plans to plant the first of two orders of more than 5,700 Engelmann spruce seedlings provided by the Missoula chapter of the Exchange Club. These trees, which will go into riparian areas, may be planted in part by the club itself.

Reforestation is key to mitigating damage and rehabilitating forests after a fire. Referring to the west side of the Sula State Forest, where the fire burned severely over most of the land, Hamilton Unit Manager Mark Lewing said, "It would take hundreds of years for Mother Nature to regenerate this acreage."

Perspective

DNRC is committed to reforestation. In Fiscal Year 2002 alone, DNRC planted about 735 acres with nearly 150,000 trees. The seedling survival rate is

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generally about 85 percent. A much larger program, covering over 1,000 acres per year, is expected over the next five to seven years.

Why is reforestation so important?

DNRC's basic goal is to help the land grow trees that will later generate income for the state school trust. However, planting trees does more than just put new trees back on the landscape. Trees and their roots help stabilize the soil, preventing erosion and the subsequent deposition of sediment in streams. Their shade and cover help the soil retain moisture and nutrients and provide habitat for wildlife. And, a verdant landscape is more aesthetically pleasing than a stark expanse of blackened sticks.

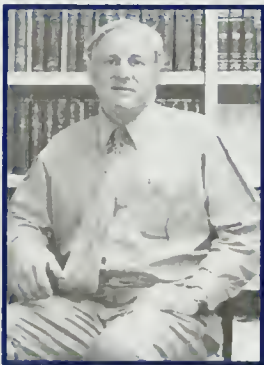
The kind of trees that are planted is also important. Montana is known for its ponderosa pine stands. However, in planting different species of trees, DNRC is attempting to bring historical regimes — that is, some semblance of the 1900s — back to the state forests.

Cassidy summed up DNRC's outlook by saying, "These trees will not only be producing revenue for the state schools many years from now, but right now they will help the areas maintain their integrity and assist the soil, plants, and animals recover from the fire faster than if left to do it naturally."



—A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR—

HOLIDAY GREETINGS TO ALL



As November slips away, we find ourselves smack dab in the holiday season. Thanksgiving, Christmas, and then New Year's, followed on its heels by the legislative session. Well, three out of four isn't bad.

The upcoming season is an opportune time to spend some quality time with your families and friends. Sure, we have lots to do at the department, but hopefully you don't "live" for the department. All too often, we get so wrapped up in our work or careers that many things slip by . . . things that are much more important. As each day passes and my bones get older, that gets all the more evident to me. So, go forth, and have some fun. Visit your grandma, call a friend, chase some elk, eat a turkey, gorge yourself with pumpkin pie, and, if the spirit moves you, root for the GRIZ. They need all the help they can get this season!

Now to discuss the fourth item listed above: the upcoming legislative session. As you all know, it is predicted to be a challenging session as legislators look to fill a \$250 million shortfall. Recent media reports further state that the executive budget targets 50 full-

time employees (FTEs) for elimination. Let me dispel any concern you might have over that item. We at DNRC have managed our vacant FTE positions to maximize our flexibility in responding to unknown legislative cuts. It has been and continues to be my strategy to meet legislative FTE reductions through current vacancies.

Now, that's not to say that we will all continue to do the same stuff we've always done. Rather, we as a department need to be equally flexible in allocating our emphasis and resources. For instance, rather than laying off an employee in a lower priority program while filling a vacancy somewhere else with a new employee, we may shift employees around to continue to meet the needs of our higher priority programs while maintaining continued employment for all of you. While perhaps inconvenient, and I hope you'll agree, it's certainly much more palatable than layoffs.

These times of budget uncertainty are a bit unnerving for all of us, but I'm confident we'll survive. Sure, there'll be some reductions and changes, but, when the dust settles, we'll all be all right. I pledge to you to do my best to see to that. We have developed a reputation as a "can do" agency, from firefighting to flood management. Responding to the current budget crisis, by remaining flexible, adjusting our priorities, and tightening our belts, is something that I'm confident we "can do."

Thanks for your continued commitment to the mission of DNRC, and . . . Happy Holidays!

—WATER RESOURCES DIVISION MOVE—

In March 1996, as part of the reorganization of Montana's natural resource agencies, DNRC's Water Resources Division (WRD) moved from the Metcalf Building in the Capitol complex to its current location in the former New York Store Building, downtown on the walking mall. Six years later, WRD is moving back across town to a new home at 1424 Ninth Avenue, near the Capitol and just down the street from DNRC's headquarters. The new location was formerly the headquarters of the Montana Department of Commerce.

The Montana Department of Administration, General Services Division, hired an architect to prepare structural, electrical, and mechanical drawings. Remodeling efforts were delayed because asbestos was found in some of the older ceiling tiles. A certified remediation contractor was hired to remove the ceiling tiles and carpet, and to do a "wipe down" to make the building asbestos-free. At the end of October, General Services hired a contractor, and the remodeling began. The planned work is significant and includes modifying the current office layout, replacing the entire drop-down ceiling and light fixtures, sheet rocking™ all areas that had paneling, replacing all carpet, and upgrading the heating and ventilation system.

Although the exact date of the move largely depends on the progress of the remodeling, WRD expects to be in the new location by March 2003. The Helena Water Resources Regional Office, which is now situated in the Placer Center downtown, will follow, moving in April.

WRD employees enjoyed being downtown and will miss the good coffee and the excitement of that area. There are many positive sides to the move, however, such as having more space, co-locating with the regional office, being much closer to the main DNRC building, and being more easily accessible to the public. Maybe the most important benefit will be to Montana taxpayers, as the cost for office space will be reduced by more than half.



1424 Ninth Avenue location.



—2002 GOVERNOR'S EXCELLENCE AWARD—

In September, 77 employees from Montana state government agencies received the prestigious Governor's Award for Excellence in Performance, both as individuals and as team members. The DNRC employee receiving this honor in 2002 was Mike Mikota of the Centralized Services Division in Helena.

Mikota is chief of the Personnel Bureau. Although not a stranger to state government, he has been with DNRC for only one year. Mike was nominated for the award because of his untiring efforts in converting the entire department from Pay Plan 60 and Pay Plan 80 to Pay Plan 20, updating and developing policies, and developing specific strategies for management in the areas of recruitment/selection and performance appraisal.

Mikota has 19 years of experience in public education as a teacher, school counselor, and administrator. One of his honors was being part of an administrative team in Havre that garnered the middle school the status of a "Blue Ribbon School."

Before working in education, Mike worked for the State of Montana for seven years. He spent four years as a senior personnel specialist for the Department of Administration and three years as the personnel officer for the Department of Commerce.

"We are pleased that Mike is a part of the DNRC team," said DNRC Centralized Services Division Administrator Ann Bauchman. "With his experience, expertise, and sense of humor, he gives the division a strong resource from which to assist all of DNRC."

This is the thirteenth year that Montana state employees have been formally recognized for their accomplishments. Former Governor Stan Stephens was the first to present performance awards to exceptional

state employees. Governor Judy Martz continued the tradition this year, making the presentations in the State Capitol Building.

Upon receiving the award, Mikota commented, "This award was made possible because I work with so many talented and motivated co-workers."



Mike Mikota accepts his award from Governor Martz. Lt. Governor Karl Ohs is in the background.

—MACD's ANNUAL CONVENTION—

As regular as fall colors and the migration of ducks, Montana's 58 conservation districts (CDs) gather each November to share information, form partnerships, and prepare for the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. These annual conventions are sponsored by the Montana Association of Conservation Districts (MACD) and hosted at a different location each year by a local CD. MACD and the conservation districts use this event as an opportunity to meet with others involved in natural resource conservation and to establish policy.

This year, Fergus County CD hosted the event at the Yogo Inn in Lewistown on November 20-21. Many timely topics were addressed, including chal-

lenges expected in the upcoming legislative session. Lt. Governor Karl Ohs delivered the keynote address before the evening banquet. David White, state conservationist with the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service, discussed opportunities for our state that are offered by the new federal farm bill. And Reid Smith, president of the National Association of Conservation Districts, was on hand to discuss national conservation issues and developments.

Approximately 250 persons, including farmers and ranchers, representatives of CDs and MACD, employees of several state and federal agencies, and representatives from various other organizations, attended

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the convention. Staff from DNRC's Conservation and Resource Development Division (CARDD) actively participate in the program, making presentations, providing input on issues, and conducting workshops.

Conservation districts are governmental entities, created in statute as political subdivisions of the state, to help citizens provide for the conservation and wise use of natural resources. The jurisdictional boundaries of most CDs coincide with county lines, and an elected and appointed board of supervisors oversees each district. Districts are involved in conservation projects and activities such as stream bank protection, water quality enhancement, federal farm bill program delivery, forest management, conservation education, noxious weed management, watershed management, and many others.

MACD is a private, nonprofit organization of conservation districts, which serves as a collective voice for policy and legislation that affect the districts. At the state level, the association works with state agencies and the legislature to help direct natural resource policy, while nationally it works with the National Association of Conservation Districts to influence the activities of federal agencies and Congress.

Working through MACD is an effective way to reach all of the CDs in Montana. DNRC program staff who wish to appear before this audience at the annual November convention, or to communicate with CDs statewide on other occasions, should work directly with Sarah Carlson, MACD executive director, at 406-443-5311.



—WILDLAND FIREFIGHTER-OF-THE-YEAR AWARD—

Ed Tovey, a seasonal firefighter with a 27-year firefighting career, is the recipient of the prestigious DNRC Wildland Firefighter-of-the-Year Award for 2001. Tovey, who works for the Helena Unit of the Central Land Office, received the recognition at a dinner held in Helena in his honor in August.

Tovey began his career in 1974, doing slash work in Lincoln, and was then promoted to engine boss. Most of his years at DNRC have been spent in Helena, working in numerous fire-related capacities and culminating as a Type 3 Incident Commander. Tovey's accomplishments include:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------|
| • Annual Safety Award | Seven Years |
| • Unit Firefighter of the Year | Two Years |
| • DNRC Engine Boss of the Year | Two Years |

Tovey's professionalism and career-long contribution to wildfire suppression have benefited not only the Helena Unit and Central Land Office, but also the agency as a whole. "Ed has seen a lot of bad fire seasons in his career. His experience has helped us all over the years," stated Butch Kroll, DNRC Firefighter of the Year in 1997.

In addition to his individual accomplishments, Ed has been invaluable in the training of hundreds of firefighters both within and outside of DNRC. "Many of our finest firefighters and engine bosses sharpened their Pulaski's as well as their skills under Ed's tutelage," said Fire Program Manager Greg Morris.

DNRC Fire and Aviation Management Bureau Chief Tim Murphy commented that Tovey was deserving of the award due to years of dedication to the state of Montana, DNRC, and, most importantly, the idea that fire can be fought safely.

Congratulations to Ed!



Ed Tovey (center) accepts his award from Bureau Chief Tim Murphy.



—SLIPS, TRIPS, AND FALLS—

Have you ever:

- Run down a flight of stairs?
- Walked along a corridor while reading something?
- Worked on a machine near a greasy spill?
- Worn shoes with slick soles during the winter?
- Stepped out of a vehicle onto a slippery surface without holding on to something?

Probably everyone can answer “Yes” to at least one of the above, and all of these situations can result in an accident. Whether in the office, a shop, a parking lot, or the field, you may be risking a fall without even knowing it.

Slips, trips, and falls are common causes of injury in DNRC. In the past two and one half years, DNRC employees have submitted 51 cases of slips, trips, and falls to the Montana State Fund (workers’ compensation) for processing. The cost for medical treatment of these 51 cases was a whopping \$115,064!

If your insurance company had to pay this amount for injuries, it would probably raise your premium – and that is exactly what is happening to DNRC. In the last two years, DNRC’s worker’s compensation insurance premium has increased by 25 percent, and the cost has tripled since 1995. This is especially significant because the premium is paid from general fund dollars that could otherwise have been spent on equipment, contracted services, or personnel to help accomplish our agency’s mission.

What can be done? Being safety-conscious is a good start. Here’s a list of safety tips for you to keep in mind, both at work and at home. These tips come from actual accidents that have happened to DNRC employees.

- Check your shoes. If the soles are loose or worn, replace them. Be careful when you come indoors when it’s raining or snowing; your shoes or boots will slide more easily when wet. Last year alone, DNRC had five claims from individuals who slipped on the ice when wearing the wrong type of footwear to work.
- Look for tripping hazards. If you see litter, extension cords, or other objects in a hallway or aisle, move them or report them. Also watch for loose or torn carpeting, mats, or runners that can send you or someone else stumbling and falling. **Two individuals filed claims because they tripped on worn carpet and broke their ankles.**
- Be careful on sidewalks and entryways. Obey signs such as “Caution: Wet Floor.” Also, make sure you use salt or sand on an icy walkway. **Icy sidewalks and parking lots have contributed to ten claims, one of which involved a broken arm, another a broken wrist, and a third, a broken tailbone.**
- Clean up spills immediately. **Four DNRC claims have come from folks slipping on oil spills in a shop area.**
- Don’t carry heavy or bulky loads that obstruct your view, especially on stairs or ramps. **DNRC had one case where an individual carrying a heavy load fell off the edge of a sidewalk, which resulted in a broken ankle.**
- Don’t store things on or near stairways. Someone could trip and tumble to the bottom.
- Be alert at all times. Keep your head up while walking. Don’t run down a hallway — and remember, no horseplay.

DNRC is committed to preventing slips, trips, and falls at work. To succeed, everyone must endeavor to make our work environment as safe and accident-free as possible. Employees who develop the skills to recognize, avoid, and control potential slip, trip, and fall hazards will be safer and happier, both on and off the job.



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